

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

A system and method for identifying target packets in a network. The invention identifies packets by computing a hash value over at least a portion of a packet passing  
5 through a network device such as a router. The hash value is used as an address, or index, into a memory. The hash value identifies a unique memory address and a flag is set at the respective memory location. When a target packet is detected elsewhere in a network, the network device receives a query message containing a hash value of the target packet. The network device compares the target packet to the hash values in  
10 memory. A match between the hash value in memory and the hash value in the query message indicates the target packet was observed by the network device. After a match is detected, the network device makes a reply available to the network.